



Environmental Watch on North Caucasus

Russia, 385012, Maikop, Poselkovaya St. 36, tel/fax: +7(8772)540607; e-mail: <envwnc@gmail.com>

No. EW-120/1-09 From 24.06.2009

To the Head of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee
Mrs Maria Jesus San Segundo

The Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center
Mr Francesco Bandarin

*The delegates at the 33rd session
of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee*

THE WESTERN CAUCASUS WORLD HERITAGE SITE IS UNDER THREAT!

Dear Sir/Madam,

We would like to draw the attentions of the delegates at the 33rd Session of UNESCO World Heritage Committee to the problem of conservation of "Western Caucasus", a World Heritage Site located in Russia. The situation around the said site is still extremely critical.

The delegates of the Committee's 32nd session made the decision regarding "Western Caucasus", basing it on the results of a UNESCO/IUCN monitoring mission. Unfortunately, Russia has not followed most of the recommendations made in this decision. Moreover, despite the recommendation, new threats to "Western Caucasus" have emerged.

Specifically, the following recommendations of 32 COM 7B.25 have not been followed:

a) Halt further construction of the road to Lunnaya Polyana, and ensure it is not enlarged, asphalted and used for recreational use, and the traffic is strictly regulated

Road construction work has stopped only on the territory of World Heritage, while elsewhere the construction of the said road, which starts in Chernigovskoye Village, is continuing. Asphalt is being laid over the first section of this road. Given the fact that the end point of the road is Lunnaya Polyana, it can be inferred that the construction stoppage on World Heritage territory is temporary and will be resumed in the future. This is evidential as the land in the path of projected construction have been taken from the Caucasus Strict Nature Reserve. Meanwhile, the Lunnaya Polyana resort continues to actively develop.

Traffic on the road that cuts through the World Heritage territory is not regulated in any way. The road is used for recreational purposes, which inflicts serious damage on World Heritage natural territories, including inside the Caucasus Reserve. Several plots of land along the road have been illegally rented out for future construction of other recreational objects, indicating that the road is expected to develop for future usage.

b) Restore the legal protection for the buffer zone of the property and ensure that it is managed fully in accordance with its World Heritage status

Not only is there no progress on developing legislation for protecting the buffer zone of the Western Caucasus World Heritage, but the Protective Zone of the Caucasus Reserve in Adygeya Republic (an independent component of the World Heritage site) has not been restored to its



protected status.

c) Stop illegal logging of forests, rehabilitate the logged areas and monitor their ecological recovery

Following the visit of the UNESCO/IUCN monitoring mission, illegal logging was stopped temporarily on the territory of Headwaters of Rivers Pshekha and Pshehashkha Nature Monument. Logging continues on the World Heritage component Protective Zone of the Caucasus Nature Reserve. Logging continued in the Headwaters of Rivers Pshekha and Pshehashkha Nature Monument in Fall of 2008, destroying primary forest territories.

d) Abandon plans for recreational use and development in Lagonaki Plateau, Mt. Fisht and Mt. Oshten areas, and ensuring that the use of infrastructure and equipment already existing on site is strictly limited

Regional authorities in Adygeya Republic continue to lobby for recreational development of the Lagonaki Plateau and the Mt. Fisht and Mt. Oshten areas. Specifically, many regional officials have publicly stated the necessity of building two large skiing resorts on the territory of the World Heritage site as well as the trans-Caucasus Maikop-Dagomys road. In regard of the possible realization of these projects the negotiations are being conducted with the Russian Government. In order to push these plans through, a road is being built illegally at this time from Guzeripl to the Lagonaki Plateau. The construction is taking place within the World Heritage site, in the Caucasus Reserve's Protective Zone in Adygeya Republic.

e) Ensure that the Biosphere Centre built at Lunnaya Polyana is used for management, research and monitoring, or visitor information purposes only, and not converted into a recreational facility

Biosphere Centre is being used as an elite recreational resort, its activities have no relation to the research, monitoring, and management of the World Heritage site, nor is it used for visitor informational purposes. The center is managed by Rosneft oil company, which is developing it as a mountain resort. At this time, preparation for the second stage of the resort's construction is under way. The second stage entails additional ski lifts, lit slopes, a snowmobile stadium, motocross routes, a stable for horses, and other facilities.

f) Prevent construction of facilities and infrastructure related to the 2014 Winter Olympics within or in the proximity of the World Heritage property, especially in very sensitive areas like Grushevy ridge

Construction on three Olympic venues, the bobsled track, the Olympic mountain village, and the water intake structure, has been stopped, in an important move by the Russian government. At the same time, the Olympic biathlon complex has not been moved from Grushevy Ridge, a territory located in close proximity to World Heritage territory. Moreover, there are more construction plans on or near World Heritage territories. One is the access road to the Olympic Ski Complex on Psekhako Ridge, which is projected to pass through the World Heritage Site and its buffer zone. A VIP complex and additional ski slopes of the Gazprom ski complex are also planned on Psekhako Ridge in the World Heritage buffer zone.

h) Subject all construction projects of the 2014 Winter Olympics facilities and infrastructure to a full and independent environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedure which explicitly assesses the likely impacts of projects on the outstanding universal value and integrity of the property, as well as on the Sochi National Park

The situation is practically unchanged. Environmental impact assessment of Olympic objects is still carried out very poorly and is neither full nor independent.

In conclusion, the destruction of protected natural territories of the World Heritage Site



“Western Caucasus” is continuing despite any possible efforts. This is obvious from the construction of Guzeripl-Lagonaki Plateau road, the construction of Biosphere Centre, and the continued logging. Moreover, large objects are planned for construction on the World Heritage territory and its buffer zone.

In our opinion, the situation around “Western Caucasus” Site is the most alarming out of all World Heritage sites in Russia and needs additional decisive actions from the World Heritage Committee if it is to stay an intact natural territory.

We ask you consider issue about inclusion of “Western Caucasus” in the “World Heritage In Danger” list at the 33rd session. We also ask you to make a decision about quickly sending a monitoring mission that would inspect the current conditions affecting the integrity of the Property.

Andrey Rudomakha

Coordinator of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus

Valery Brinikh

*Board Member of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus,
Co-chairman of the International Socio-Environmental Union*

Aleksey Yablokov

*Board Member of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus,
Vice-Chairman of the Scientific Council
of Russian Academy of the Sciences
for issues of the ecologies and emergency situations,*

Tatyana Lysenko

*Board Member of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus,
Vice-Chairman of Maikop organization
of All-Russian Societe of Nature Conservation*

Dmitry Kaptsov

Vice-Coordinator of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus

Dmitry Shevchenko

Vice-Coordinator of Environmental Watch on North Caucasus